



Women in the Ancient World

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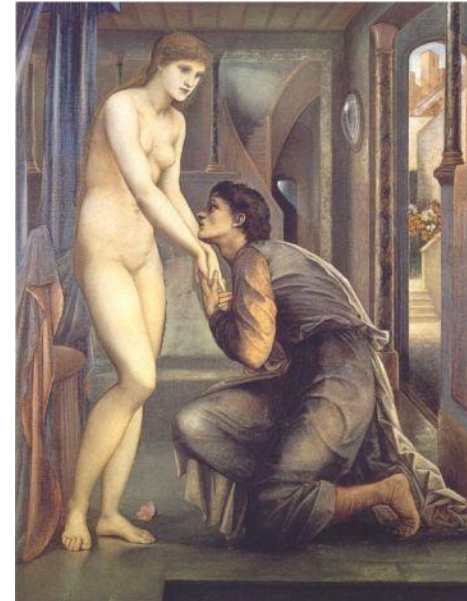
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Pygmalion (told by Orpheus), transl. D. Raeburn Ovid *Metamorphoses* 10

Sick of the vices with which the female sex
has been so richly endowed, he chose for a number of years
to remain unmarried, without a partner to share his bed.
In the course of time he successfully carved an amazingly skillful
statue in ivory, white as snow, an image of perfect
feminine beauty – and fell in love with his own creation.
This heavenly woman appeared to be real...
art was concealed by art to a rare degree.

Sharrock, A. R. 'Wom manufacture' *Journal of Roman Studies* 81 (1991) 36-49





Edward Burne-Jones'
Pygmalion

Euripides *Medea*, transl. D. Kovacs

Medea: Of all creatures that have breath and sensation, we women are the most unfortunate. First at an exorbitant price we must buy a husband and take a master for our bodies.... The outcome of our life's striving hangs on this, whether we take a bad or a good husband. For divorce is discreditable for woman and it is not possible to refuse wedlock. When a woman comes into the new customs and practices of her husband's house, she must somehow divine, since she has not learned it at home, how she shall best deal with her husband. If after we have spent great efforts on these tasks our husbands live with us without resenting the marriage yoke, our life is enviable. Otherwise, death is preferable. A man, whenever he is annoyed with the company of those in the house, goes elsewhere and thus rids his soul of its boredom. But we must fix our gaze on one person only. Men say that we live a life free from danger at home while *they* fight with the spear. How wrong they are! I would rather stand three times with a shield in battle than give birth once.

Euripides *Medea*, transl. D. Kovacs

Chorus: Men's thoughts have become deceitful and their oaths by the gods do not hold fast. The common talk will so alter that women's ways will enjoy good repute. Honor is coming to the female sex: no more will women be maligned by slanderous rumor.

The poetry of ancient bards will cease to hymn our faithlessness. Phoebus lord of song [the god Apollo] never endowed our minds with the glorious strains of the lyre. Else I could have sounded a hymn in reply to the male sex.

Propertius *Elegy* 1.3, transl. C. P. Goold

Like the maid of Cnossus [Ariadne] as in a swoon she lay on the deserted shore when Theseus' ship sailed away; like Cepheus' daughter Andromeda as she rested in her first slumber on her release from the rugged cliff; no less like the Thracian bacchant, exhausted after incessant dances, when she collapses on the grassy bank of the Apidanus; even so did Cynthia seem to me to breathe a gentle repose, her head pillowed on a cushion of her hands, when home I came dragging footsteps unsteadied by much wine and the slaves were shaking their dying torches in the far-gone night.

...I did not venture to disturb my lady's peace, fearing the chidings of a cruelty I had tasted before; but I remained rooted with eyes intent upon her...

And now I was taking off the garlands from my brow and arranging them about your temples, Cynthia; and now I took pleasure in building up your fallen locks...

Propertius *Elegy* 1.3, transl. C. P. Goold

At length the moon hurrying by the parted shutters... opened with its gentle beams Cynthia's fast-closed eyes. Then, with elbow propped on the soft couch, she cried: 'Has another's scorn then at last brought you to my bed, expelling you from doors closed in your face? For where have you spent the long hours of the night which was due me, you who come, ah me, exhausted, when the stars are driven from the sky? Oh, may you spend nights like these, you villain, such as you are always compelling poor me to endure!'



T. Vindol. II 291 (c. 97-103; in BM)

